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Ricord Is Convicted of Plot To Smuggle Drugs to U.S.

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

Auguste Joseph Ricord was convicted in Federal District Court here yesterday of conspiring to smuggle narcotics, culminating a two-year effort by the Government to sever the so-called "Latin-American connection" in international heroin trafficking.

A jury of seven men and five women deliberated for two hours and 20 minutes before returning with their verdict of guilty on the single conspiracy count. Ricord, a 61-year-old Argentine citizen who was born in France, faces a mandatory five-year jail term and could get as much as 20 years.

Officials have said that Ricord's operation was responsible for half the heroin smuggled into the United States in the last five years—a total of perhaps 15 tons. In the last six weeks, the Government has announced moves against three other major rings transshipping heroin through Latin America, but Ricord's was the largest such operation.

Judge John M. Cannella set Jan. 29 for sentencing. Ricord was continued in custody in $1.5-million bail. His attorney, Herbert I. Handman, said he would appeal the conviction.

Ricord, a small, bald man with fluffy gray muttonchops, showed no reaction when the verdict was announced. Then he turned in his chair and, with a slight smile, gave a shrug of resignation to his 34-year-old niece, who was weeping, and to his 15-year-old daughter. As he was led from the courtroom, he shook the hand of Paul Boulad, the Bureau of Customs special agent in charge of his case.

The first crack in Ricord's case came in September, 1970, when the United States consul in Asunción, Paraguay, received an anonymous letter, typewritten on blue Eastern Airlines stationery, listing private planes allegedly being used to smuggle heroin into Miami.

The consul forwarded the letter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which gave it to the Bureau of Customs in Miami. On Oct. 18, a customs radio operator heard that one of the suspect planes, a Cessna

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Truman's Condition

Doctors reported yesterday that former President Harry S. Truman, in "very serious" condition in a Kansas City hospital, was threatened with kidney failure. Page 29.

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210 with identification letters LVHDW, was on its way to Miami International Airport from Kingston, Jamaica, on a flight that had originated in Asunción.

Customs set up extensive surveillance by plainclothes men at the airport, but let the plane enter with perfunctory formalities. The two-man crew was followed from the time the plane was parked.

The pilot was a 34-year-old man who uses the name Cesár Bianchi. He apparently was born in the United States as Roberto Galluchi, grew up in Brazil and was a racing-car driver before moving to Paraguay to fly smugglers' planes. Paraguay is considered the warehouse for illicit cigarettes and liquor in South America.

Co-Pilot Served in Vietnam

The co-pilot was Renato Balestra, a 26-year-old Brazilian who had studied in the United States and who won a Purple Heart while serving with the United States Navy in Vietnam.

The two men took nothing from the plane but their personal effects. The next day, Oct. 19, 1970, they took off again, followed by a Customs plane. The Cessna made an evasive flight over the Everglades, then landed at a small airport in Miramar, 10 miles from Miami. Again, Bianchi and Balestra left without taking anything from the plane.

Customs agents searched the aircraft and found three suitcases, containing 94 pounds of heroin, concealed behind an access panel in the tail. The pilots were arrested that night and agreed to cooperate in implicating other members of the ring. Flour was substituted for the heroin, and Bianchi and Balestra, under surveillance, brought it to New York.

4 Others Arrested

In succeeding days, four other members of the ring were drawn into negotiations over the supposed heroin in New York. They were Enio Anibal Varela-Segovia, a powerful Paraguayan who had become a millionaire through smuggling; Aron Muravnik, another alleged higher-up in the ring, and Pierre Gahou and Felix Becker, who served largely as couriers. On. Oct. 27, all were arrested.

At first, no one mentioned Ricord. The case received a setback in January, 1971, when Muravnik and Varela escaped from the Federal House of Detention on West Street. The escape apparently was well-planned and well-financed. Neither have been returned to custody. Muravnik is believed to be in Argentina, and Varela almost certainly is on a ranch about 72 miles from Asunción.

After the escape, the remaining members began to cooperate with the Government. By March, 1971, there was enough evidence to implicate Ricord as the leader, and he was arrested in Paraguay on a launch as he was attempting to go to Argentina. Ricord's Paris-Nice motel-restaurant on the outskirts of Asunción was described as the center of operations.

A 17-month wrangle followed in the Paraguayan courts for the extradition of Ricord, who had never been in the United States. After heavy pressure by the State Department on the Paraguayan Government, extradition was granted last September.

In the case presented by Walter M. Phillips Jr., an assistant United States attorney in charge of the drug unit in the Southern District of New York, and Eugene Bannigan, his associate, Bianchi, Becker and Gahou gave testimony linking Ricord with receiving heroin smuggled from European laboratories, turning it over for shipment to the United States, and receiving the proceeds of its sale in New York.

Past Record Was Issue

Becker and Gahou have pleaded guilty to smuggling charges; Becker is serving a five-year term and Gahou a seven-year term. Charges are still pending against Bianchi. Balestra is not considered a member of the conspiracy and it is likely charges against him will be dropped.

Unknown to the jury, a source of considerable discussion between the attorneys and Judge Cannella during the two-week trial were attempts to introduce Ricord's criminal record. None of it was allowed in evidence.

According to French and American records, Ricord was born in Marseilles of Corsican parents on April 26, 1911. As a teen-ager he became involved with the port's Corsican underworld. He was first arrested at 16 for extortion and by 18 had become a leading pimp.

Collaborated With Nazis

During World War II, he collaborated with the Nazis, shaking down nightclubs in Paris to provide funds for the French Gestapo. After the war he fled France, allegedly with $100,000, and landed in Argentina under the name Lucien Dargelles.

Ricord was sentenced to death in absentia in France for the collaboration, and also to a 20-year term for robbery. The statute of limitations on both charges has expired.

Ricord operated restaurants and pick-up places in Argentina and in Venezuela, and faced procuring charges in both countries. He has said that his partner in a Venezuelan club was Papillon (Henri-Antoine Charrière), an escaped French convict who wrote a best-selling book about his adventures.